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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5541  
INFO RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0248  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9932  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6892  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 4965  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3575  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0697  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3663  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0993  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2743  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7464  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5179  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0118  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1850  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000338

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [ECON](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: FORMER PRESIDENT KUMARATUNGA EXCORIATES  
HER SUCCESSOR

REF: COLOMBO 337 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b, d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Former President Chandrika Kumaratunga expressed strong disapproval of President Rajapaksa's approach to governance in a meeting with Ambassador on February 26. She feared that the current government was committed to trying to resolve the country's ethnic conflict through purely military means, but said she did not think this would succeed. The recent cabinet reshuffle had produced further instability, she said, noting that there was an undercurrent of unease in the ruling party about the President's autocratic style and the influence of his brothers. She thought the government's popularity would sag as the consequences of inappropriate economic policies began to take hold. She denied harboring any further political ambitions, adding that the President had advised her to reside abroad. End summary.

GOVERNMENT COMMITTED TO WAR?  
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12. (C) Former President Chandrika Kumaratunga told Ambassador on February 26 that her successor Mahinda Rajapaksa clearly intended to lead the country down the path of war. He and his advisors had opted to try for a military solution to the problem posed by the ethnic conflict, she thought. However, she was convinced that they would not succeed in this. She claimed that she had always supported maximum power sharing as the way to bridge the ethnic divide. However, Rajapaksa, "quite unnecessarily" in her view, had sought an alliance with the radical Sinhalese nationalist parties JVP and JHU, thus sharpening the conflict. She noted that support for devolution by the Sinhalese majority had undergone wide fluctuations, depending on the messages sent by the country's leaders. At the moment, sentiment for power-sharing was at a low ebb.

DEVOLUTION OF POWER THE ONLY ANSWER

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¶3. (C) Kumaratunga noted that the current constitution requires a two-thirds majority to make major institutional changes. Sri Lanka's proportional representation electoral system meant that only cooperation between the two major parties could produce this constitutional majority. The recent political maneuvering may have brought the President short-term advantages, but a devolution proposal would still need the support of the principal opposition UNP. She said that the sacking of two SLFP ministers, including former Foreign Minister Samaraweera, had only brought further instability. Regional party meetings called to endorse the president's move had not produced a single resolution endorsing the firing of the ministers, she noted.

¶4. (C) Kumaratunga predicted that the government would run into serious political problems within a few months because "they are having trouble running the economy properly." She believed that accelerating inflation and anemic job creation would sap the government's present high popularity with the Sinhalese majority.

NOT SEEKING A COMEBACK  
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¶5. (C) Kumaratunga commented that politics in Sri Lanka had become such a "filthy and dangerous business" that "decent people don't want to enter politics any more." She denied that she had any further political ambitions and said categorically that she was not seeking to make a comeback. However, she was contemplating making a statement about the

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condition of the country before redeparting for London (where she lives near her grown children). She added that even if she wanted to remain in Sri Lanka, the President had advised her against it: "Honestly, madam, I think you ought to go abroad."

DRIFTING TOWARD DICTATORSHIP?  
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¶6. (C) Kumaratunga noted that President Rajapaksa is intolerant of criticism from any quarter. For example, she said, he did not permit any discussion of Sri Lanka's problems with abductions and disappearances in Cabinet meetings. This was one of the reasons that Foreign Minister Samaraweera had been sacked, she added. She did not think the government was conducting serious investigations into these incidents. She would not be surprised if the President invoked his powers under the Constitution, never used until now, to prorogue Parliament and rule by executive decree. Even ministers were intimidated to the degree that they were afraid to be seen meeting with her, she said, resorting instead to sending her "secret messages." She feared the country was drifting toward a dictatorship.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Some of the bile Chandrika directed at her successor undoubtedly stems from pique at being frozen out of the SLFP power structure. Although some her criticism appears overblown, it reflects an undercurrent of unease in part of the ruling party at the President's autocratic style and the influence wielded by his closest, unelected advisors -- especially his two brothers Gothabaya and Basil. So far, few members of the SLFP have dared to challenge the President's authority. However, setbacks to the government, especially any significant military misadventures, could cause the latent discontent to break out into the open.  
BLAKE